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**SPEECH BY AMBASSADOR MORIARTY AT  
THE CLOSING CEREMONY OF A  
JOURNALIST WORKSHOP ON AVIAN INFLUENZA**

**NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF MASS COMMUNICATION (NIMCO)**

**April 30, 2009**

Mr. Md. Muklesur Rahman Khan, Director General, National Institute of (NIMCO); Mr. Brian Armstead, Voice of America Office of Development; Workshop participants; and members of the Press:

Assalamu alaykum and good afternoon. It is a pleasure to be here with you today for the closing of this important workshop. To date, we have detected the H5N1 avian influenza virus in 63 countries, resulting in the deaths of more than 250 people and the death or destruction of more than 250 million birds. The poultry industry has lost billions of dollars due to avian influenza.

Although incidents of animal-to-human transmission are low, the virus remains highly pathogenic. Its alarming rate of mutation fuels concern that it will lead to a human influenza pandemic at some point in the future. However, for the first time in human history, we have advance warning of a potentially devastating pandemic, thanks to the work of scientists around the world. With this warning, we are taking action to save the lives of millions of people.

The United States is on the front lines of the fight against avian influenza. To date, the U.S. Government has pledged more than \$900 million to combat AI internationally. More than a dozen agencies representing Diplomacy, Development and Defense contribute to the U.S. efforts in South Asia. Within this region, the U.S. works closely with governments and international organizations such as the World Health Organization, the Food and Agriculture Organization, and the World Organization for Animal Health on regional and bilateral programs. The U.S., through the Voice of America, also provides training to journalists and educates millions of listeners in South Asia and around the world about avian influenza.

Bangladesh is one of a handful of countries at the epicenter of the global avian influenza threat. Since 2005, the United States Government has provided more than \$15 million in assistance for avian

influenza -related projects here. This money helps Bangladesh strengthen animal and human surveillance systems, train animal and human health response teams and front-line workers, and support national communications programs. Partly due to this assistance, the number of avian influenza outbreaks in Bangladesh has declined by more than 80% compared to last year.

While Bangladesh has made great progress in combating avian influenza, much work remains. Preventing this virus, or another one, from causing a pandemic requires all our efforts. In farms, laboratories, government offices, and news rooms, all of us play a critical role.

I would like to focus now on the media's role in the fight against avian influenza and human pandemic influenza. All countries must make the media a full partner in preparing for and responding to avian influenza outbreaks. Until recently, media across the world has lacked preparation to report effectively on avian influenza outbreaks. The first H5N1 outbreak in Bangladesh among poultry led to sensational media headlines causing public alarm and panic. The same thing occurred last year when there were outbreaks throughout the country. The media must seek out training and information to report on avian flu issues correctly and authoritatively.

Why is the media so important? Media headlines are usually the public's first and often only source of information. The media can play a key role in containing the spread of bird flu by alerting health and government officials to rumors of a new outbreak and conveying vital health and safety information to the public. The media also have an important role in ensuring transparency and accountability in the government.

Effective reporting on avian influenza is not easy. It is difficult to explain scientific concepts to the general public. However, in order to control the spread of this virus, the media must be able to inform all members of society – from farmers to consumers – about the virus, how to prevent it, and what happens when we detect it. This means not simply reporting on deaths and outbreaks, but also providing up-to-date information about the latest scientific breakthroughs, conveying examples of how other countries deal with outbreaks, and dispelling myths about avian influenza.

This two-day workshop, organized by the U.S. Government with the support of the Bangladesh Government, is part of that briefing process. As key journalists in Bangladesh, you now have the necessary tools to understand the threat of avian influenza. You have the tools to inform the public about avian influenza. And you have the tools to ensure transparency and accountability in the government as it adopts measures to control the spread of this virus.

I hope that this workshop is just the beginning of your efforts to report effectively on avian influenza and other public health threats. The participation of Bangladesh Government avian influenza

experts in this workshop serves as a starting point for new lines of communication between the media, health and veterinary experts, and government officials. Unfortunately, we will continue to see AI outbreaks among poultry in Bangladesh. As the country responds to this public health menace, it is imperative that you provide accurate information to the public and the government. Armed with your experience here at this workshop, I am confident that you will do just that.

Thank you.

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*\*As prepared for delivery*

**GR/ 2009**